

THE COMPARISON OF TOY PREFERENCES OF TEACHER CANDIDATES IN FIRST AND FOURTH GRADES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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SUMMARY

This study has been carried out in order to investigate and compare understanding of toy selection of teacher candidates in first and fourth grade of preschool education. In order to achieve this, a survey that has been developed by the researcher after the literature review has been applied to 52 preschool teacher candidates in first and 52 preschool teacher candidates in fourth grade who study in Uludag University, Faculty of Education Preschool Education Program. Differences between groups have been investigated with "chi square test". Findings indicated that fourth grade teacher candidates pay much more attention than first grade teacher candidates to criteria of reading label information when choosing a toy, checking CE conformity mark and producing company information, if the toys are harmful or not, have allergenic effects, consist of carcinogenic material or not, toy's ease of cleaning, attractiveness, toy's price and choosing the toy they saw on commercials and they have more confidence that every toy on sale has been inspected.

Key Words: Preschool, teacher candidate, toy selection.

INTRODUCTION

During early childhood period, game is necessary for the child to learn and toys are the tools that ensure this process. Toy is in close relation with child's self representation, imagination, interests, discovery, description, education, cognitive development, awareness of gender roles. The fact that Piaget considers interaction with objects as an important part of cognitive development also supports this point of view (Glassy & Romano, 2003). Owen Blakemore and Centers (2008) who accept that toy has an important place in child's life, argue that toy is rather effective in development of cognitive skills and in the increase of social games played with other children and role playing. Toys played with a group help the child gain skills such as ability to cooperate and ability to obey the rules (Mangır & Aktaş 1993; Öztürk, 1997; Poyraz, 1999; Başal, 2005). According to Peretti and Sydney (1984), who researches the effects of toys on children, children are able to describe their worlds and feelings when they play with toys. Moreover, toys played with groups also create an environment for use of language in addition to their attribution to the social and emotional development of child. For example, sentence forming, questioning, answering and storytelling skills of children who communicate with each other through games develop (Spodek & Saracho, 2005). Moreover, toys that address psychomotor development of children improve hand-eye coordination, and have an effect on development of big and small muscles (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

Even though there are various toys made of different materials, with different colors and features, ideal toy is the one that makes children want to play with it again and again; it presents opportunity to play more, and amuses more. Toys should arouse curiosity in children, work the muscles, promote experimenting and imagination, encourage children to solve problems (Galigan, 2000; Russ, 1998). A playroom arranged to arouse children's interest will

keep children's perception on alert and stimulate their senses systematically and constantly. But this arrangement should never restrain children's freedom in their rooms; it should not prevent them from creating their own world. Buying new toys make children happy. But buying new toys is not more important than making the existing toys draw their attention (İlhan 2004). Primary factor to keep in mind while choosing the toy is the age of the child. Children of early ages like toys such as a colorful rattle, which will stimulate all of their senses, and toys like these have a great role in development of their senses that have yet to mature. Children who just started walking like to play games where they place or remove cube that are in different shape and size. Using their newly acquired wrist movement skills children around the age two prefer simple legos that they can build up to other toys. Children of preschool age like all kinds of objects that support their creative characteristics. With this point of view it can be seen that children are naturally more inclined to toys which will improve their skills that they have gained in their current age. Each new skill that children develop is a game for them (Uluğ, 1997). Simple but entertaining toys create the opportunity for a creative and active stimulation. For example all pots, reels and dough in houses set a game environment that children can shape as they will. In fact, children shape their own personalities in this environment. Water, sand, soil, mud and paints help children to get to know outside world and gain experience. As children grow up, tools that serve as toys also become varied. For example books and reading, when selected according to subjects they love and are interested in, become the most amusing toys and games. Moreover, drawing scenes and characters from the book teach children to create images in their minds and reinforce their memory. Also, encouraging children to talk about subjects they like will both improve their vocabulary and reinforce their speaking skills (Sarı, 2002).

When buying toys, those that have safety warnings on them should be preferred and they should have a certain level of quality, standard and safety so that the pieces and parts of

the toys do not pose any threat for children of their age (Telep 1997, Glassy & Romano 2003, İlhan, 2004). According to the regulation about toys prepared by Ministry of Health designating procedures and principles related to design, production and supervision of toys, risks related to use of the toy and steps to prevent them should be shown on toys or on labels on their packages and in user manual in a manner that will attract attention. As required by this regulation, CE Conformity Marking, Name and/or Business Name or Brand and Address of Producer or Importer, Age Appropriate Warning, Information related to Certain Risks That Toys Could Carry and User Manual should be present on the toy or on its label. When buying toys, those factors should be taken into account, user manual and warning should be read, given information should be heeded (Toy Safety Factsheet, 2001). CE Conformity Marking is a sign indicating that the product has minimal safety requirements and granting quality assurance (Official journal dated May 17 2002 RG: Issue: 24758; European Commission, 2004; Approval Marks CE Mark, 2005). Age Appropriate Warning indicates for which age group the toys are suitable. The statement "Not safe for children under 3" has been written on toys since 1995 (Langlois & Wallen, 1991). Dangers (inflammableness, heating, disassembly, etc.) that may be caused by toys' physical, chemical and electrical features should be indicated. User manual should contain information about correct and safe use of the toy (Official journal dated May 17 2002 RG: Issue: 24758)

For these reasons, every child should play with toys suitable for their development and needs. At this point it is important for teachers and parents to know the children well and to be conscious in selecting the right toys (Glassy & Romano, 2003).

Aim of the Study

This study has been carried out in order to investigate and compare understanding of toy selection of teacher candidates in first and fourth grade of preschool education. Even though there are many sources on the importance of toy selection, studies on the subject is

very few in our country. This study is important for being a resource for parents, academicians and researchers about things to look out for in toys and during toy selection.

METHOD

Research Model

This descriptive study has been carried out in order to investigate and compare understanding of toy selection of teacher candidates in first and fourth grade of preschool education. In order to achieve this, a survey which had been developed by the researcher was applied to teacher candidates who study in Uludag University's Department of Preschool Education in Faculty of Education.

Research Group

52 from first, 52 from fourth grade, a total of 104 preschool teacher candidates who are studying in Department of Preschool Teacher of Uludag University form the sample of this research.

Data Gathering Tools

Survey questions have been developed by the researchers after the literature review (Arıcan & Karaca 2004; Çamur et al., 2008; Doğanay, 1998) about teacher candidates' criteria (toy's suitability for children's skill, intelligence, imagination development, violence-free, risk-free (safe), easy-to-clean, gender and age appropriate nature, being cheap or expensive, appearance, being liked by children) when choosing a toy. In the survey, 8 questions in section "Presence of warnings related to safety", 7 questions in section "In order to determine toy's safety...", 14 questions in section "Mark the most suitable one to you from the criteria to consider when buying a toy", and 9 questions in section "When children are harmed by the toy..." were directed at teacher candidates and they were asked to answer either yes or no and sometimes choose one of the options.

Data Analysis

The survey has been applied by the researcher to teacher candidates from first and fourth grades. The research data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, and "chi square analysis" has been used by utilizing SPSS 13.0 program in order to find the significance of the difference between groups.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Chi Square Test Results of Comparison between First and Fourth Grade Preschool Teacher Candidates' Opinions on the Presence of a Safety Warning on Toys

Conditions of Safety Inscriptions		1st Class		4th Class		TOTAL		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
I read the warnings on the toy	Yes	31	29,81	38	36,54	69	100	$X^2=.535$ P=.231
	No	2	1,92	2	1,92	4	100	
	Sometimes	19	18,27	12	11,54	31	100	
I read the inscriptions	Yes	28	26,92	41	39,42	69	100	$X^2=3.506^*$ P=.002
	No	2	1,92	3	2,88	5	100	
	Sometimes	22	21,15	8	7,69	30	100	
I look for the CE Mark	Yes	23	22,12	42	40,38	65	100	$X^2=2.654^*$ P=.00
	No	1	0,96	1	0,96	2	100	
	Sometimes	28	26,92	9	8,65	37	100	
I look for the producing company information	Yes	19	18,27	38	36,54	57	100	$X^2=2.408^*$ P=.001
	No	2	1,92	2	1,92	4	100	
	Sometimes	31	29,81	12	11,54	43	100	
I look for the age suitability phrase	Yes	21	20,19	25	24,04	46	100	$X^2=.643$ P=.543
	No	1	0,96	3	2,88	4	100	
	Sometimes	30	28,85	24	23,08	54	100	
I look for the security warning	Yes	22	21,15	31	29,81	53	100	$X^2=.328$ P=.122
	No	4	3,85	2	1,92	6	100	
	Sometimes	26	25,00	29	27,88	55	100	
I read the user's manual	Yes	24	23,08	29	27,88	53	100	$X^2=.987$ P=.054
	No	2	1,92	2	1,92	4	100	
	Sometimes	26	25,00	21	20,19	47	100	
I look for all of the above	Yes	35	33,65	42	40,38	77	100	$X^2=.659$ P=.548
	No	2	1,92	1	0,96	3	100	
	Sometimes	15	14,42	9	8,65	24	100	
TOTAL		52	50	52	50	104	100	

*p<.05

Results of chi square test, which had been prepared in order to compare the opinions of first and fourth grade teacher candidates on the presence of safety warnings on toys, can be seen in Table 1. The point averages indicate that there is a significant difference in favor of fourth grade teacher candidates in the items of "I read the inscriptions" ($p=.002$; $X^2=3,506$), "I

look for the CE Mark” ($p=.00$; $X^2=2,654$) and “I look for the producing company information” ($p=.001$; $X^2=2,408$). The point average of other items examined indicates that there is no significant difference between the answers of first and fourth grade preschool teacher candidates.

Table 2. Chi Square Test Results of Comparison between First and Fourth Grade Preschool Teacher Candidates’ Opinions on Safety of Toys

In order to know if the toy is safe...		1st Class		4th Class		TOTAL		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
I look at the information on the toy	Yes	34	32,69	41	39,42	75	100	$X^2=.657$ $P=.058$
	No	2	1,92	3	2,88	5	100	
	Sometimes	16	15,38	8	7,69	24	100	
I debrief the seller	Yes	28	26,92	26	25,00	54	100	$X^2=.654$ $P=.128$
	No	4	3,85	2	1,92	6	100	
	Sometimes	20	19,23	24	23,08	44	100	
I look at the price	Yes	24	23,08	39	37,50	63	100	$X^2=1.760^*$ $P=.001$
	No	4	3,85	3	2,88	7	100	
	Sometimes	24	23,08	10	9,62	34	100	
The advices of the ones who bought the toy before are important	Yes	21	20,19	27	25,96	48	100	$X^2=.652$ $P=.165$
	No	4	3,85	1	0,96	5	100	
	Sometimes	27	25,96	24	23,08	51	100	
The choice of my child is important	Yes	25	24,04	39	37,50	64	100	$X^2=.765$ $P=.217$
	No	2	1,92	2	1,92	4	100	
	Sometimes	28	26,92	11	10,58	39	100	
I choose the toys which I saw in an advertisement	Yes	29	27,88	41	39,42	70	100	$X^2=2.654^*$ $P=.02$
	No	1	0,96	-	-	1	100	
	Sometimes	22	21,15	11	10,58	33	100	
Every toy which is sold is has been checked, I trust them	Yes	34	32,69	44	42,31	78	100	$X^2=1.564^*$ $P=.001$
	No	5	4,81	-	-	5	100	
	Sometimes	13	12,50	8	7,69	21	100	
TOTAL		52	50	52	50	104	100	

* $p<.05$

In Table 2, first and fourth grade preschool teacher candidates’ opinions related to safety of toys have been compared. Chi square analysis showed that there is a significant difference in favor of fourth grade preschool teacher candidates in the items of “I look at price”($p=.001$; $X^2 =1,760$), "I choose the toy which I saw in an advertisement” ($p=.02$; $X^2 =2,654$), “Every toy which is sold has been checked, I trust them” ($p=.001$; $X^2 =1,564$). The

point averages of other items show that there is no significant difference between the answers of first and fourth grade preschool teacher candidates.

Table 3. Chi Square Test Results of Comparison between First and Fourth Grade Preschool Teacher Candidates' Criteria When Buying Toys

The Criteria When Buying a toy	1st Class		4th Class		TOTAL			
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Developing skills	Yes	32	30,77	36	34,62	68	100	$X^2=.748$ P=.554
	No	4	3,85	2	1,92	6	100	
	Sometimes	16	15,38	14	13,46	30	100	
Developing mind	Yes	28	26,92	24	23,08	52	100	$X^2=.034$ P=.432
	No	12	11,54	5	4,81	17	100	
	Sometimes	12	11,54	23	22,12	35	100	
Developing imagination	Yes	21	20,19	25	24,04	46	100	$X^2=.642$ P=.340
	No	18	17,31	4	3,85	22	100	
	Sometimes	13	12,50	23	22,12	36	100	
Not supporting violence	Yes	42	40,38	38	36,54	80	100	$X^2=1.760$ P=.320
	No	3	2,88	9	8,65	12	100	
	Sometimes	7	6,73	5	4,81	12	100	
Being assuring	Yes	26	25,00	25	24,04	51	100	$X^2=.698$ P=.986
	No	16	15,38	6	5,77	22	100	
	Sometimes	10	9,62	21	20,19	31	100	
Being easy clean	Yes	15	14,42	27	25,96	42	100	$X^2=1.702^*$ P=.001
	No	5	4,81	8	7,69	13	100	
	Sometimes	32	30,77	17	16,35	49	100	
Appropriate to the gender of the child	Yes	34	32,69	27	25,96	61	100	$X^2=.650$ P=.347
	No	5	4,81	3	2,88	8	100	
	Sometimes	13	12,50	22	21,15	35	100	
Appropriate to the age of the child	Yes	32	30,77	32	30,77	64	100	$X^2=.620$ P=.558
	No	4	3,85	2	1,92	6	100	
	Sometimes	16	15,38	18	17,31	34	100	
The price of the toy	Yes	19	18,27	22	21,15	41	100	$X^2=2.654^*$ P=.002
	No	2	1,92	3	2,88	5	100	
	Sometimes	31	29,81	27	25,96	58	100	
Toy being interesting	Yes	21	20,19	32	30,77	53	100	$X^2=2.605^*$ P=.04
	No	7	6,73	2	1,92	9	100	
	Sometimes	24	23,08	18	17,31	42	100	
The child liking the toy	Yes	35	33,65	25	24,04	60	100	$X^2=.675$ P=.876
	No	3	2,88	4	3,85	7	100	
	Sometimes	14	13,46	23	22,12	37	100	
The toy having an advertisement	Yes	12	11,54	16	15,38	28	100	$X^2=.438$ P=.763
	No	10	9,62	15	14,42	25	100	
	Sometimes	30	28,85	21	20,19	51	100	
Being of high quality	Yes	37	35,58	38	36,54	75	100	$X^2=.843$ P=.669
	No	2	1,92	1	0,96	3	100	
	Sometimes	13	12,50	13	12,50	26	100	
Being sanitary	Yes	32	30,77	43	41,35	75	100	$X^2=.889$ P=.552
	No	6	5,77	-	-	6	100	
	Sometimes	14	13,46	9	8,65	23	100	
TOTAL		52	50	52	50	104	100	

*p<.05

Chi square analysis of first and fourth grade preschool teacher candidates' criteria when buying toys show that there is a significant difference in the items of "Being easy clean" ($p=.001$; $X^2 =1,702$), "The price of the toy" ($p=.002$; $X^2=2,654$) and "Toy being interesting" ($p=.04$; $X^2 =2,605$) in favor of fourth grade preschool teachers. No significant difference has been found between two groups in the other items.

Table 4. Chi Square Test Results of Comparison between First and Fourth Grade Preschool Teacher Candidates' Opinions on Whether Toys Can Harm Children

The situation of toys harming the children		1st Class		4th Class		TOTAL		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
It won't harm	Yes	23	22,12	19	18,27	42	100	$X^2 =.765$ $P=.438$
	No	3	2,88	2	1,92	5	100	
	Sometimes	26	25,00	31	29,81	57	100	
It may harm	Yes	25	24,04	30	28,85	55	100	$X^2 =.789^*$ $P=.02$
	No	4	3,85	2	1,92	6	100	
	Sometimes	23	22,12	20	19,23	43	100	
It may cause accidents (falling, drowning, hurt by sharp toys, cut, inflame, bursting)	Yes	28	26,92	26	25,00	54	100	$X^2 =.943$ $P=.978$
	No	6	5,77	6	5,77	12	100	
	Sometimes	18	17,31	20	19,23	38	100	
Carcinogenic effect	Yes	24	23,08	37	35,58	61	100	$X^2 =3.659^*$ $P=.001$
	No	3	2,88	1	0,96	4	100	
	Sometimes	27	25,96	14	13,46	41	100	
Intoxication	Yes	19	18,27	28	26,92	47	100	$X^2 =2.548^*$ $P=.02$
	No	7	6,73	2	1,92	9	100	
	Sometimes	26	25,00	22	21,15	48	100	
Allergy	Yes	18	17,31	25	24,04	43	100	$X^2 =1.546^*$ $P=.001$
	No	4	3,85	1	0,96	5	100	
	Sometimes	30	28,85	26	25,00	56	100	
Having negative habitudes	Yes	21	20,19	22	21,15	43	100	$X^2 =.236$ $P=.689$
	No	8	7,69	5	4,81	13	100	
	Sometimes	23	22,12	25	24,04	48	100	
Not suitable to the age of the child	Yes	27	25,96	28	26,92	55	100	$X^2 =.428$ $P=.945$
	No	12	11,54	3	2,88	15	100	
	Sometimes	13	12,50	21	20,19	34	100	
The price of the toy	Yes	29	27,88	26	25,00	55	100	$X^2 =1.439^*$ $P=.00$
	No	4	3,85	7	6,73	11	100	
	Sometimes	19	18,27	19	18,27	38	100	
TOTAL		52	50	52	50	104	100	

* $p<.05$

According to the results of chi square test on the opinions of teacher candidates on whether the toys can harm children, a significant difference has been found in the items of "It may harm", ($p=.02$; $X^2=.789$), "Carcinogenic effect" ($p=.001$; $X^2=3,659$), "Intoxication" ($p=.02$; $X^2=2,548$), "Allergy" ($p=.001$; $X^2=1,546$), "The price of the toy" ($p=.00$; $X^2=1,439$) in

favor of fourth grade preschool teacher candidates. When point averages of other items are examined no significant difference has been found between the answers of first and fourth grade preschool teacher candidates.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study which was carried out in order to make a comparison between toy selections of preschool teacher candidates in first and fourth grade, it is seen that fourth grade teacher candidates pay much more attention than first grade teacher candidates to criteria of reading label information when choosing a toy and checking CE conformity mark and producing company information. Moreover, in order to determine toy's safety, fourth grade teacher candidates pay more attention than first grade teacher candidates to toy's price and choose the toy they saw on commercials and they have more confidence that every toy on sale has been inspected. Also, during toy selection, fourth grade teacher candidates pay more regard than first grade teacher candidates to toy's ease of cleaning, prices and attractiveness. Similarly fourth grade teacher candidates pay more attention than first grade teacher candidates to the fact that the toys are harmful or not, have allergenic effects, consist of carcinogenic material or not. When other answers are evaluated, it is seen that there is no significant difference between fourth and first grade teacher candidates.

The fact that fourth grade teacher candidates earn more points than first grade teacher candidates in some questions related to toy safety, toy selection and toys' harmfulness gives rise to the thought that teacher candidates become more conscious during education process and thus it is considered a positive finding.

Studies made show that toy sellers have more awareness than buyers about CE Conformity Mark, producing company information, age appropriate warning, safety warning and user manual on toys, but sellers' guidance in the subject is not mentioned (Çamur et al., 2008). However in a study that was carried out with the help of toy vendors in US it was

determined that 44.0% of the vendors stated that they could sell toys with “suitable for children above three year old” label to children of two-three of age (Teret et al., 1991). When safety of children is considered, a ratio of 44% cannot be regarded as too little.

Studies about mothers’ toy selection show that they pay attention (Doğanay, 1998) to the fact that whether the toy is suitable for children's development level, age and interests or not (Erden, 2001), whether children like the toy they will be buying or not, its attractiveness (Arıcan & Karacan, 2004), whether it has TSI stamp or not, it is durable or not, it poses any threat or not, and it is easy to clean or not. In a study done by Fallon and his friends (1989) 73 people in US with children of preschool age stated that the two most important factors that affect their choices when buying toys are toy's safety and potential to teach new skills. (Çamur et al., 2008)

It is also known that some toys, which are bought to make children learn and entertain, carry certain risks. In a research done by Çamur and his friends (2008) with toy vendors and buyers, it has been determined that 78,9 % of the buyers and 87,8 % of the vendors stated that toys can be harmful to children's health and this harm comes in the form of “accidents”. It is also stated in the literature that toys that promote violence should not be purchased (Glassy & Romano, 2003).

One of the preschool teacher's role in the classroom requires decisions to be made about the play materials (Spidell, 2006). It should be known that choosing the right and proper toy has direct impacts on the physical and psychological development of the child and so the toys should not be chosen randomly but with caution (Arıcan & Karacan, 2004). When the criteria that teachers hold when they buy toys are considered, it can be said that they become more conscious when they reach fourth grade. This situation shows that there is a need for guidance in order to increase the awareness on toy safety. It is a noncontestable fact that teachers who choose the right toys that children tend to interact with, will be successful in

raising healthy individuals. Hence, it is thought that knowing the understandings of teacher candidates when buying toys would be helpful in increasing the importance given to the subject in the process of undergraduate education.

SUGGESTIONS

Following suggestions can be made for further researches;

- Giving more detailed information about toy selection and safety as well as the importance of games and toys in preschool teaching education will be useful for teacher candidates to choose the most beneficial toys for children.
- In-service trainings can be organized for preschool teachers on the subject and they can be encouraged to give advices to the families about it.
- Conducting studies including parents and people around children, preschool teachers and educators from other fields can be made for further researches.

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